

Software eases scheduling burdens

If your business requires scheduling staff on a weekly basis, you should consider a new software program that eases the burden. It's called Working Hours.

This nifty, easy-to-use program, for \$99.95 from by Power Up!, 2929 Campus Drive, San Mateo, Calif. 94403, takes almost no time to learn, yet it can be a real time saver.

It's not for everyone, however.

Here's a rundown on what it can do:

- **Maintain an employee roster.** Working Hours maintains a data base of employee information. This data includes names, telephone numbers, social security numbers, and even times when an employee is unavailable. This information can be used to print a staff roster or create records for employee files.

- **Switch among different formats "on the fly."** The same data can be displayed in six different formats. The choice of format depends on whether it's important to



Hillel Segal

view, say, a week's summary of staff assignments, all the assignments for each employee individually, or all the people involved for a given task. Any changes made in one format are immediately reflected in all the others.

- **Print in different styles.** You can choose the time frame for printed output from one day to a full week. In addition, individual schedules can be printed for each employee showing just his or her shifts. Schedules can even be printed sideways if the printer supports IBM graphics.

There are many advantages of going the computer route instead of sticking to your tried and true manual methods. For example: copies of long, involved schedules

can be printed lengthwise on continuous paper; the output is neat and extra copies are just a matter of reprinting; and the program can print selective schedules for any staff person or position.

It can be used in other ways, too. It's a natural for scheduling classrooms or meeting rooms. And while Working Hours isn't intended as a project manager, it could be pressed into that role for simple, short-term project tracking. Several of its formats delimit time periods with the familiar horizontal Gantt chart lines.

On the downside, there are two features that should have been taken further. First, the program does not provide an easy way to work with multiple weeks at the same time. For example, you have to set up each week separately in order to do a whole month at a time. Second, Working Hours issues a warning when employees are scheduled during their unavailable times, but it limits you to only three unavailable time periods per employee,

which are too few.

Also, as easy as this program is to use, in many instances it simply isn't worth the trouble. You have to ask yourself if using a computer program instead of scheduling manually is really the best use of your time. It's probably not, if your scheduling isn't complicated.

■ **The bottom line.** A program like this has to be easy to use to compete with manual systems, and Working Hours passes the test. I found it to be a snap to update and print any number of weekly staff schedules. And, unlike manual systems, it offers flexible formats and tie-ins to personnel data. It's inexpensive enough so that any manager with a computer and the need to list weekly schedules should try it out.

Hillel Segal's column includes evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.